

Nevada Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability

Focus Group 5

**Elko, NV
July 12, 2005
Follow Up Report**



Executive Summary

The Elko focus group session on July 12, 2005 provided valuable input from the state and local practitioner perspective for the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan. The focus group participants identified the following top three major initiatives to be considered during the upcoming strategic planning session in Las Vegas on September 14, 2005:

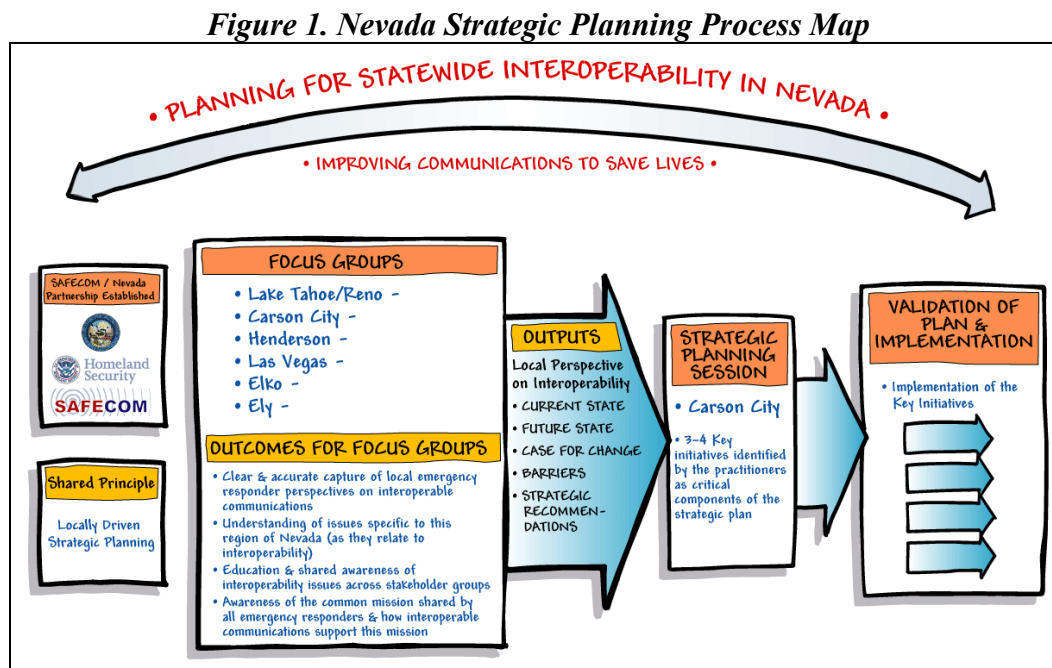
- (1) Determine a current inventory so we know what we have, current capabilities, and know where we need to go
- (2) Form a formal working group to build a plan (an interoperability plan for the 5 counties)
- (3) Develop a funding strategy

Introduction

The State of Nevada has established a partnership with the SAFECOM Program to conduct a pilot project that will lead to the development of a communications interoperability strategic plan that includes the input of public safety practitioners. SAFECOM's mission is to serve as the umbrella program within the federal government to help local, state, tribal and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan. The Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) serves as the primary point of contact for these efforts.*

In order to develop a collaborative Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan, the State has asked SAFECOM to conduct six (6) regional focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments. Additional representation includes public health, local and state agencies in order to accurately capture local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Nevada. In addition to the 6 focus group sessions, a strategic planning session will also be conducted to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups.

The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM will bring locally driven philosophy and strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and strategic planning session.



* The members of the Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) who participated in this focus group did so in their practitioner or individual agency role. They did not participate as members of the NCSC. No NCSC deliberations were undertaken, nor decisions made.

The outcomes of the focus group sessions are as follows:

- ☐ Clear and accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
- ☐ Understanding of issues specific to this region of Nevada (as they relate to interoperability)
- ☐ Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- ☐ Awareness of the common mission shared by all emergency responders, saving lives, and how interoperable communications support this mission

Each focus group session is designed as a series of conversations centered on the following issues: interoperability (statewide and regional) as it relates to the current state, the envisioned future state, case for why change needs to happen, barriers to achieving the future state, and recommended strategies to pursue.

Detailed Overview

Current State

The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts about current interoperability capabilities and needs in Nevada regarding response efforts spanning day-to-day operations up through catastrophic events.

The Elko focus group identified the following Current State themes specific to communications interoperability in Nevada:

- There is a lack of formal coordination, prioritization, information sharing and training within and between counties
- Rural counties cannot successfully compete with the metropolitan areas for funding because Homeland Security funding is distributed according to population (Reno and Las Vegas get the lion's share of funding)
- Federal agencies are influenced by vendors and are buying the most current equipment (e.g. satellite radios), but not necessarily the best equipment for everyday communications
- Extremely remote areas of the region are not interoperable, such as Jarbidge, Midas, Currie; mountaintops are so remote that practitioners have to relay on solar cells for power and wilderness areas are not available for strategic placement of communications sites
- The individuals that control the dollars do not have the expertise, education, and/or awareness to make appropriate purchasing decisions; therefore these decisions are



heavily influenced by vendors whose equipment is only interoperable with other equipment manufactured by the same vendor

- Communications in rural Nevada is driven by vendors. This, plus the fact that all of the entities are making independent, not coordinated purchasing decisions, leads to expensive infrastructure and equipment costs
- There are three competing state level entities with three competing agendas and the local agencies look to the state for direction
 - Nevada Department of Transportation
 - Nevada Department of Public Safety, Nevada Highway Patrol (NHP)
 - State of Nevada Department of Information Technology
- P 25 compliant radios are very expensive, forcing agencies to buy noncompliant radios in order to get the number of radios needed
- Most tribes are 20 years behind in radio capabilities and contract with the counties
 - There are currently informal Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with tribal organizations to share frequencies
 - Elko and Humboldt dispatches with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
 - Tribal and BIA are two different entities; BIA helps with funding
 - Tribes contracted their funding from the BIA to operate their own systems because of non-service
- The EMS UHF system started in 1975 and while there are some dead spots, most ambulances can talk to the hospitals
 - Ambulances have to carry multiple radios and require an electrical engineer to enable EMS to talk with Fire and NHP

Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Nevada.

The Elko focus group highlighted the following elements of the Future State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- Every public safety entity is capable of communicating voice and data with every other entity
- A redundant system exists where if one dispatch center fails another dispatch center can immediately pick up
- Scheduled and unscheduled training events are organized to simulate real-life, decided on through leadership, and has the following characteristics:
 - Simple and accessible
 - Standardized and uniform
 - Integrated and comprehensive at all levels
 - Frequent multi-jurisdictional(e.g. mock disasters, dispatch center failure, tabletops)
- There is a clear, common language used to communicate across disciplines
- This region is acting as a model for the state and for the nation

- The region has a central control point to exchange and transfer regional systems and data
 - The region operates a regional board of users under a regional master plan
 - Managers and leaders collaborate
 - The regional boards are represented and influential at the state level as well as at the federal agencies and Congress
- The funding of interoperability in this region has the following characteristics:
 - There is non-competitive, long-term, and reliable funding with no strings attached
 - There is an annual review and education for our funding boards
 - The first responder community utilizes its own tax district for funding instead of using general funds
- All practitioners know how to use their equipment, which is compatible with all other systems used in the region
- The region has access to unbiased experts to provide advice exclusively for the practitioners needs; then the practitioners tell vendors what they want and the vendors build it



- The region utilizes a satellite system for transporting data and communicating, like the military, along with terrestrial backups

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Nevada's

state of interoperable communications do not occur, in addition to the opportunities that may be missed by not changing. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals and result in action.

The Elko focus group identified the following elements as part of making a Case for Change:

- Local systems are very antiquated and it is time to stop putting band-aids on the problem
- Cost to the community could be very devastating – risk to the lives of first responders and the people who live in your community
 - For example, if a bus load of local teenagers were to tip over somewhere on I-80, it is currently very challenging for first responders to communicate in a coordinated way
- Local politicians have supported some of the interoperability efforts in the past; the region acknowledges past efforts and support for current accomplishments
- Practitioners are severely limited in being able to talk across agencies and within their own agencies

- EMS, Fire, Sheriffs, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and other public safety practitioners representing the five local counties in this region, have created a coalition to work on communications interoperability
- The coalition plans to build a system that is not fragmented, will save money in the long run with lower maintenance costs and upgrades, and give the public safety community the safety they deserve
- This requires funding for standing up a communications committee charged with implementing practitioner recommendations on how to improve communications across our region
- Investing in interoperability will:
 - Create major cost savings by sharing resources, purchasing equipment that works together, and reducing maintenance costs
 - Prevent lawsuits from the officers out on the field who are unable to talk to each other and will inevitably get hurt
 - Help the region prepare for future events(e.g. nuclear waste transported across our region)
 - Help with training, coordination, exercises, and policies in preparation for major incidents
 - Create necessary redundancy for existing communications systems in case of an emergency event

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

The Elko participants identified the following barriers:

- Human nature resists change and egos resist working together
- The region is justifiably skeptical, as practitioners have not seen a working system
- Lack of a coordinated funding stream
 - Need to justify the cost of this type of system and convince the taxpayers that this is a necessity
- Fear of layoffs
- Practitioners do not fully understand all of the available funding sources
- Lack of technical knowledge
- Lack of understanding on exactly what the region wants as a group, what the existent shortfalls are, and how to achieve these goals
- Practitioners do not know who to trust (e.g. which technical specialist to listen to)
- Lack of forums to share information and cross-train staff
- Everyone, except Humboldt County, lacks internal communications and technical support needed for direction and guidance on future

Strategic Recommendations

The purpose of the Strategic Recommendations conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state, including the completion of the statewide plan and identification of the most important initiatives the state can undertake in the short term.

The Elko focus group participants identified the following top three (3) critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

- (1) Determine a current inventory so we know what we have, current capabilities, and know where we need to go
- (2) Form a formal working group to build a plan (an interoperability plan for the 5 counties)
- (3) Develop a funding strategy

Next Steps

The outcomes from the 6 regional focus group sessions will drive the upcoming strategic planning session. The key initiatives identified by practitioners across the state will serve as the documented view of the user community detailing their perspective on efforts that will most improve interoperable communications in the State of Nevada. The strategic planning session is scheduled to take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 14, 2005.

The SAFECOM/Nevada Partnership is committed to maintaining communications with the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Nevada progresses. This report details the results of the Elko focus group meeting and was distributed to the participants on Friday, July 22, 2005 (a list of focus group participants is included as Appendix A). In addition, the results of the conversations with all 6 focus groups will be made available to all participants in late July.

Immediate actions participants committed to based on their participation in the focus group include:

- Participants will write a memo/informal agreement for local VHF users designating one channel for mutual aid in that region in the case of an emergency
- Humboldt County will build a web page that contains frequencies and PL tones (Private Line) for public safety agencies in the five counties and share the responsibility of keeping it current
- Each entity will list their contact people for technical support
- SAFECOM will send all focus group results to NCSC

Appendix A

Participants in the July 12, 2005 focus group meeting, in Nevada's Elko Area on Nevada's Strategic Planning for Statewide Communications Interoperability:

First Name	Last Name	Division/Department	Phone	Email
Vicki	Albin	Elko Central Dispatch	775-777-7301	valbin@frontiernet.net
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Jay	Bruner	Elko Police Department	775-777-7315	epdl@ci.elko.nv.us
Paul	Burkholder	Humboldt County	775-623-6349	hccdpaul@sbcglobal.net
John	Croswell	Elko County Sheriff	775-777-2504	jcroswell@citilink.net
Bill	Cunningham	Elko City Undersheriff	775-777-2502	bcunningham@elkocountynv.us
Larry	Etter	Eureka County S.O.	775-237-5330	letter.ecso@eurekanv.org
Pat	Gallagher	NHP Central Command		pgallagher@dps.state.nv.us
Ric	Grantham	Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Communications	775-623-6419	hccdric@sbcglobal.net
Kevin	Hall	Northern Region of the Nevada Department of Forestry	775-738-3454	khall@forestry.nv.gov
Bill	Hance	Elko Central Dispatch	775-777-7307	ccda@frontiernet.net
Neil	Harris	Elko City Sheriff's Office	775-777-2501	sheriff@elkocountynv.net
Megan	Hernandez	Westwendover Police Department	775-664-4393	meganhernandez67@hotmail.com
Gene	Hill	Humboldt County Sheriff	775-623-6419	h101@hcsnv.com
Joyce	Jeppeson	Eureka County Dispatch	775-237-5701	jjeppsen.ecso@eurekanv.org
Will	Johnston	LEPC, Elko County Carlin Fire	775-754-6969	firedept@explorecarlinnv.com
Brian	Jonas	Humboldt County Sheriff's Office	775-623-6419	h102@hcsnv.com
Karla	Jones	Carlin Volunteer Fire Department	775-754-6969	firedept@explorecarlinnv.com
Michael	Parrish	Fire Chief Fallon/Churchill Fire Department	775-427-3910	mwp911@phonewave.net
Robert	Quick	Lander County Sheriff's Office	775-635-1100	rquick@landerso.org
Dennis	Simmons	Elko Band Council Law Enforcement	775-738-9251	elkobandpd@citilink.net
Ron	Supp	City Police Chief for Westwendover	775-664-2930	psupp@westwendovercity.com
Bill	Webb	Elko County Emergency Management/Coroner	775-738-8046	bandaid@elkocountynv.net

Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Nevada Strategic Planning Process

